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New Brunswick Human Rights Commission

International Women's Day statement (07/03/06)

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FREDERICTON (CNB) - The following message was issued by Gordon L. Porter, chair of the New Brunswick Human Rights Commission, in recognition of International Women's Day:

March 8 is International Women's Day. In Canada, the theme this year is Ending Violence Against Women: Action for Real Results.

This theme is well chosen, since violence against women continues to be a problem in Canada and throughout the world.

In 1999, Kofi Annan, then secretary general of the United Nations, said, "Violence against women is perhaps the most shameful human rights violation, and it is perhaps the most pervasive. It knows no boundaries of geography, culture, or wealth. As long as it continues, we cannot claim to be making real progress towards equality, development, and peace."

The work of the New Brunswick Human Rights Commission helps to improve the lives of women by promoting equal opportunity in employment, housing and services, and toward harassment-free workplaces and other environments.

There has been a great deal of progress since the *Human Rights Act* was amended in 1971 to prohibit discrimination based on sex, and amended in 1973 to prohibit discrimination based on marital status. These additions to the act were needed because women faced barriers finding jobs in non-traditional occupations, and, in some cases, could still lose their jobs when they married.

There has also been much progress since the first sexual harassment complaints were filed in the early '80s. Until then, the entire problem had been invisible, and in most cases there was no legal recourse. Today, anti-harassment policies are commonplace, and there is widespread awareness of harassment.

However, the New Brunswick Human Rights Commission continues to receive 40 to 60 sex discrimination and sexual harassment complaints each year, which represents from 12 to 24 per cent of its caseload. And it is not just the women involved who suffer the consequences. Sexual discrimination and sexual harassment often also affect their families and their co-workers. Employers also pay. As a result of sexual harassment they lose qualified staff, and incur higher health and training expenses and lower productivity.

To overcome violence, discrimination and harassment directed at women, we need to recognize that they

are not only a gender problem; they are a humanity problem. They affect all of us, and we all have a role to play in confronting them.

As we observe International Women's Day, I invite New Brunswickers to celebrate the work of those who have furthered women's equality, and to work together with us to ensure that women can work and live free from discrimination, harassment and violence.

07/03/06

MEDIA CONTACT: Francis Young, New Brunswick Human Rights Commission, 506-453-2301 or 1-888-471-2233.

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